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## Everything Is Poison!

OC

The day I landed on Earth, I weighed in at 203.7 kilograms. Now, srihassas are a big species to begin with, but even by our standards I was about 80 kilos overweight. I was shedding about twice as often as normal, my scales were taking on this weird pinkish hue, and my crueller clutch-kin were calling me “butt back” after the way my fat was creating a crease all the way up my spine. My doctor was begging me to change my lifestyle or I’d be dead within two decades. I’d tried to go in for operations, but even for a species already vulnerable to sedatives I’m unusually sensitive; my last attempt technically killed me for twenty seconds.

So when I tell you that Earth saved my life, it’s not an exaggeration.

Now, most of you must be thinking by now, “Wait, Earth? Home to humans, the species that’ll find a way to eat your shoes if you dared them to? The guys who literally drink rotten juice every weekend for fun and pesticide every morning to stay awake? That planet?” Yep. The very same. I know it seems counter-intuitive, after all, humans aren’t particularly health conscious, at least no more so than others. But the people who eat everything were the folks that helped me curb my own habits.

I was sent to Earth to oversee revamping their shipyards; this was back when they were newly inducted into the Confederation and were still modernizing. My boss warned me that it was a restricting place, but I thought he meant it was dictatorial in nature and shrugged it off. I’d done work with the Vaarkast Empire, how bad could it be? By the Seventh’s spines I should’ve done my homework. See, here’s the thing about humans eating everything: that also means they include food that you CAN’T eat. And I don’t mean things like it just being awkward tip-toeing your way around a vegetarian diet, ooooh no.

I mean to say that almost everything that humans eat is poisonous to other species. Everything. First day there my new coworkers tried to take me out for lunch to a Mexican restaurant, a type of cultural cuisine; the only thing on the menu that wouldn’t kill me was a salad. Even then I had to take the tomatoes off. I don’t think it dawned on me until that point just how omnivorous humans are, emphasis on the OMNI. Half their fruit is poisonous. They eat fungus, ALL of which is poisonous to other species. I went to get some shellfish for a Korkovan-style boil, nope those are poisonous. I went drinking with them just to see what it was like, only to have my stomach pumped because wine is made from grapes, which is POISON. They put poisonous peppers on their food that **burns their mouths** because they think it tastes good. I went to get the fabled Italian food that my coworkers wouldn’t shut up about, but that was made with A LOT of garlic and onion, which are both poisonous! My department had a pizza party, but that had cheese which is... well not poison but nobody else is lactose tolerant in adulthood besides humans. I went to get some sweets, they recommended chocolate--THAT was poisonous. I tried to get a pie, oh shoot cherry, POISON! Well maybe their sweet drinks would be--nope, caffeine, poison! I subsisted my first week there off a diet of

salad, nuts, and salmon--just about the only Earth fish I knew by name. I was able to start importing some srihassan food in the second week, but I might as well have been throwing my money into an incinerator.

Enter our lead alloy engineer Parvati. She basically took me aside and made me an offer: move into her apartment rent-free so long as I bought groceries and let her use me as the test subject for her wackier cooking experiments. Now, for those who don't know, to a male srihassa your home is **YOUR** domain, end of story. Nobody outside your breeding circle enters, and only explicitly for breeding. Even in other species, I'd never heard of anyone allowing relative strangers into their home. What kind of lunatic would risk that sort of danger? I thought that she was making a huge concession for me and that I'd be owing her a life debt. I thought that I'd be in service to her bloodline for the rest of my days... and I took her up on it, because that's how desperate those first two weeks had made me.

That woman, that absolute saint, was my personal Thirteenth Paragon. I thought that she'd just make a list of things I could eat and make do. No, Parvati acted like she was doing logistics for a war effort. She treated each and every recipe like a battle and did in-depth research on each damn ingredient just to know what I could manage. She had dossiers. DOSSIERS! Like, legit in-depth files for flavor profiles she wanted to mimic. She went to an on-net college class about srihassan nutrition. When she really wanted to use an ingredient but couldn't figure out if I could handle it, she helped me look up the prehistoric ways my people tested if something was poisonous. After a certain point I suggested we start up a vlog, Live and Let Fry, to record the whole process; I'd like to say to help people in our position, but really this was just such a comical shipwreck that we were becoming a sit-com.

Throughout all this my weight plummeted. Not that the food she got me was always healthy, but because the paranoia that every shopping trip induced killed my usual habits. I couldn't just impulse buy a pack of cookies or order a large sweet drink. Even when I identified something sweet I could eat, I typically wound up deciding to instead use that money on some new item for her to try out. I'd never seen someone show such generosity to a stranger and there was no way I could abuse that. Not a chance I'd be that ungrateful. Not every experiment was a win of course, but it was never boring. We tried every cuisine of every Earth culture during my time there and hybridized another few dozen from off-world. Even got a little community around LnLF to help figure out how best to mimic the seasonings that were poisonous. I think the best discovery was tea, technically poisonous, but mildly so to the point it mimicked for me what chilli peppers did for humans. With the depth of its connoisseur following, that has provided me no end of experiments.

Honestly, those three years were the happiest in my life up to that point. Parvati obviously didn't wind up owning me, but we'd become family all the same; my clutchlings call her Auntie Parvati now. She and I visited every major food tourism spot on the planet, from Rome to Tokyo to New York. We even hit up the street vendors in Bangkok. I'd never gotten to know my own culture as well as I've become familiar with Earth. Hyperbolic would be my word for them. Their art is exaggerated, their reactions are comically big, their architecture is totally unique, their taste in starships is utterly flamboyant; nothing is ever done

halfway. No other species could ever build a civilization on poison and definitely nobody else could make me thankful for it. When my job there was done and it was time to move on, I wasn't ready to leave.

So I didn't. We finished our work, quit, and opened a restaurant in London together called the Open House Cafe. Today, I'm happy to say that I'm down to 119.4 kilograms and we've opened six Open House locations. I'd like to say I'm proud, which I guess I am but not for myself. That's all on my good friend and adopted sister, Parvati.

Edit: Minor grammar mistakes